



I. INSTANCES WHERE DOUBLE PATENTING ISSUE CAN BE RAISED

A double patenting issue may arise between two or more pending applications, between one or more pending applications and a patent, or between one or more pending applications and a published application. A double patenting issue may likewise arise in a reexamination proceeding between the patent claims being reexamined and the claims of one or more applications and/or patents. Double patenting does not relate to international applications which have not yet entered the national stage in the United States.

A. *Between Issued Patent and One or More Applications*

Double patenting may exist between an issued patent and an application filed by the same inventive entity, or by an inventive entity having a common inventor with the patent, and/or by the owner of the patent. Since the inventor/patent owner has already secured the issuance of a first patent, the examiner must determine whether the grant of a second patent would give rise to an unjustified extension of the rights granted in the first patent.

B. *Between Copending Applications—Provisional Rejections*

Occasionally, the examiner becomes aware of two copending applications filed by the same inventive entity, or by different inventive entities having a common inventor, and/or by a common assignee that would raise an issue of double patenting if one of the applications became a patent. Where this issue can be addressed without violating the confidential status of applications (35 U.S.C. 122), the courts have sanctioned the practice of making applicant aware of the potential double patenting problem if one of the applications became a patent by permitting the examiner to make a “provisional” rejection on the ground of double patenting. *In re Mott*, 539 F.2d 1291, 190 USPQ 536 (CCPA 1976); *In re Wetterau*, 356 F.2d 556, 148 USPQ 499 (CCPA 1966). The merits of such a provisional rejection can be addressed by both the applicant and the examiner without waiting for the first patent to issue.

The “provisional” double patenting rejection should continue to be made by the examiner in each

application as long as there are conflicting claims in more than one application unless that “provisional” double patenting rejection is the only rejection remaining in one of the applications. If the “provisional” double patenting rejection in one application is the only rejection remaining in that application, the examiner should then withdraw that rejection and permit the application to issue as a patent, thereby converting the “provisional” double patenting rejection in the other application(s) into a double patenting rejection at the time the one application issues as a patent.

If the “provisional” double patenting rejections in both applications are the only rejections remaining in those applications, the examiner should then withdraw that rejection in one of the applications (e.g., the application with the earlier filing date) and permit the application to issue as a patent. The examiner should maintain the double patenting rejection in the other application as a “provisional” double patenting rejection which will be converted into a double patenting rejection when the one application issues as a patent.

C. *Between One or More Applications and a Published Application - Provisional Rejections*

Double patenting may exist between a published patent application and an application filed by the same inventive entity, or by different inventive entities having a common inventor, and/or by a common assignee. Since the published application has not yet issued as a patent, the examiner is permitted to make a “provisional” rejection on the ground of double patenting. See the discussion regarding “provisional” double patenting rejection in subsection B. above.

D. *Reexamination Proceedings*

A double patenting issue may raise a substantial new question of patentability of a claim of a patent, and thus be addressed in a reexamination proceeding. *In re Lonardo*, 119 F.3d 960, 966, 43 USPQ2d 1262, 1266 (Fed. Cir. 1997) (In giving the Commissioner authority under 35 U.S.C. 303(a) in determining the presence of a substantial new question of patentability, “Congress intended that the phrases ‘patents and publications’ and ‘other patents or publications’ in section 303(a) not be limited to *prior art* patents or printed publications.” (emphasis added)). Accordingly, if the issue of double patenting was not

B. Nonstatutory Double Patenting

A rejection based on nonstatutory double patenting is based on a judicially created doctrine grounded in public policy so as to prevent the unjustified or improper timewise extension of the right to exclude granted by a patent. *In re Goodman*, 11 F.3d 1046, 29 USPQ2d 2010 (Fed. Cir. 1993); *In re Longi*, 759 F.2d 887, 225 USPQ 645 (Fed. Cir. 1985); *In re Van Ornum*, 686 F.2d 937, 214 USPQ 761 (CCPA 1982); *In re Vogel*, 422 F.2d 438, 164 USPQ 619 (CCPA 1970); *In re Thorington*, 418 F.2d 528, 163 USPQ 644 (CCPA 1969); *In re White*, 405 F.2d 904, 160 USPQ 417 (CCPA 1969); *In re Schneller*, 397 F.2d 350, 158 USPQ 210 (CCPA 1968); *In re Sarett*, 327 F.2d 1005, 140 USPQ 474 (CCPA 1964).

1. Obviousness-Type

In determining whether a nonstatutory basis exists for a double patenting rejection, the first question to be asked is — does any claim in the application define an invention that is merely an obvious variation of an invention claimed in the patent? If the answer is yes, then an “obviousness-type” nonstatutory double patenting rejection may be appropriate. Obviousness-type double patenting requires rejection of an application claim when the claimed subject matter is **not patentably distinct** from the subject matter claimed in a commonly owned patent when the issuance of a second patent would provide unjustified extension of the term of the right to exclude granted by a patent. See *Eli Lilly & Co. v. Barr Labs., Inc.*, 251 F.3d 955, 58 USPQ2d 1865 (Fed. Cir. 2001); *Ex parte Davis*, 56 USPQ2d 1434, 1435-36 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 2000).

A double patenting rejection of the obviousness-type is “analogous to [a failure to meet] the nonobviousness requirement of 35 U.S.C. 103” except that the patent principally underlying the double patenting rejection is not considered prior art. *In re Braithwaite*, 379 F.2d 594, 154 USPQ 29 (CCPA 1967). Therefore, any analysis employed in an obviousness-type double patenting rejection parallels the guidelines for analysis of a 35 U.S.C. 103 obviousness determination. *In re Braat*, 937 F.2d 589, 19 USPQ2d 1289 (Fed. Cir. 1991); *In re Longi*, 759 F.2d 887, 225 USPQ 645 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

Since the analysis employed in an obviousness-type double patenting determination parallels the guide-

lines for a 35 U.S.C. 103(a) rejection, the factual inquiries set forth in *Graham v. John Deere Co.*, 383 U.S. 1, 148 USPQ 459 (1966), that are applied for establishing a background for determining obviousness under 35 U.S.C. 103 are employed when making an obvious-type double patenting analysis. These factual inquiries are summarized as follows:

(A) Determine the scope and content of a patent claim and the prior art relative to a claim in the application at issue;

(B) Determine the differences between the scope and content of the patent claim and the prior art as determined in (A) and the claim in the application at issue;

(C) Determine the level of ordinary skill in the pertinent art; and

(D) Evaluate any objective indicia of nonobviousness.

The conclusion of obviousness-type double patenting is made in light of these factual determinations.

Any obviousness-type double patenting rejection should make clear:

(A) The differences between the inventions defined by the conflicting claims — a claim in the patent compared to a claim in the application; and

(B) The reasons why a person of ordinary skill in the art would conclude that the invention defined in the claim in issue is an obvious variation of the invention defined in a claim in the patent.

When considering whether the invention defined in a claim of an application is an obvious variation of the invention defined in the claim of a patent, the disclosure of the patent may not be used as prior art. This does not mean that one is precluded from all use of the patent disclosure.

The specification can always be used as a dictionary to learn the meaning of a term in the patent claim. *In re Boylan*, 392 F.2d 1017, 157 USPQ 370 (CCPA 1968). Further, those portions of the specification which provide support for the patent claims may also be examined and considered when addressing the issue of whether a claim in the application defines an obvious variation of an invention claimed in the patent. *In re Vogel*, 422 F.2d 438, 441-42, 164 USPQ 619, 622 (CCPA 1970). The court in *Vogel* recognized “that it is most difficult, if not meaning-